



News for Immediate Release  
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DWR Notes 45th Anniversary of San Luis Reservoir  
Groundbreaking by President Kennedy, Governor Brown

San Luis Reservoir -- The Department of Water Resources (DWR) this August marks the 45th anniversary of historic groundbreaking ceremonies at this reservoir that helps to supply the State Water Project and the federal Central Valley Project.

On August 18, 1962, President John F. Kennedy joined California Governor Edmund G. (Pat) Brown, Sr., to celebrate the unique, state-federal partnership that led to construction of the joint-use facility that still today is the largest off-stream reservoir in the United States.

This year, the August 18 day and date align exactly with those of the dedication, when Kennedy was in the second year of his presidency.

As part of the event, Kennedy and Brown set off explosive charges to break earth at the site in a rural portion of Merced County, near Los Banos on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley. Kennedy, then 45, told an audience estimated at 10,000 that he was pleased to be able to help “blow up your valley for the cause of progress.”

History fans can re-live the event by watching [videotape](#) and watching a DVD version of the entire 18-minute Kennedy speech, at the San Luis Reservoir’s visitor center, just off State Highway 152, eight miles west of Interstate 5. (The visitor center is open free of charge five days a week, including weekends, but closed Wednesdays and Thursdays.)

San Luis Reservoir has a storage capacity of just over 2 million acre-feet, but in this dry year currently contains only about 20 percent of that amount. The reservoir was created by construction of B. F. Sisk Dam, named for a Fresno Congressman, Bernice F. Sisk, a strong advocate of water development in California. The dam is 18,600 feet long and 385 feet high. When filled, the reservoir has a 65-mile shoreline, a surface area of 12,250 acres and a maximum depth of just over 270 feet.

Dam construction began in 1963 and was completed in 1967. The reservoir began receiving water in 1967 and was filled for the first time on May 31, 1969.

San Luis' pumping plant is named in honor of William R. Gianelli, Department of Water Resources Director under Governor Ronald Reagan from 1967-1973.

Gianelli is credited with completing the initial phases of the State Water Project (SWP) and making the first SWP water deliveries to Southern California. Now retired in Pebble Beach, Gianelli donated a collection of his career memorabilia for a display at the reservoir's visitor center.

The visitor center uses videotapes, photos, graphic displays and movies to describe the reservoir and its role in providing water as part of both the State Water Project and Central Valley Project.

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The Department of Water Resources operates and maintains the State Water Project, provides dam safety and flood control and inspection services, assists local water districts in water management and water conservation planning, and plans for future statewide water needs.

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